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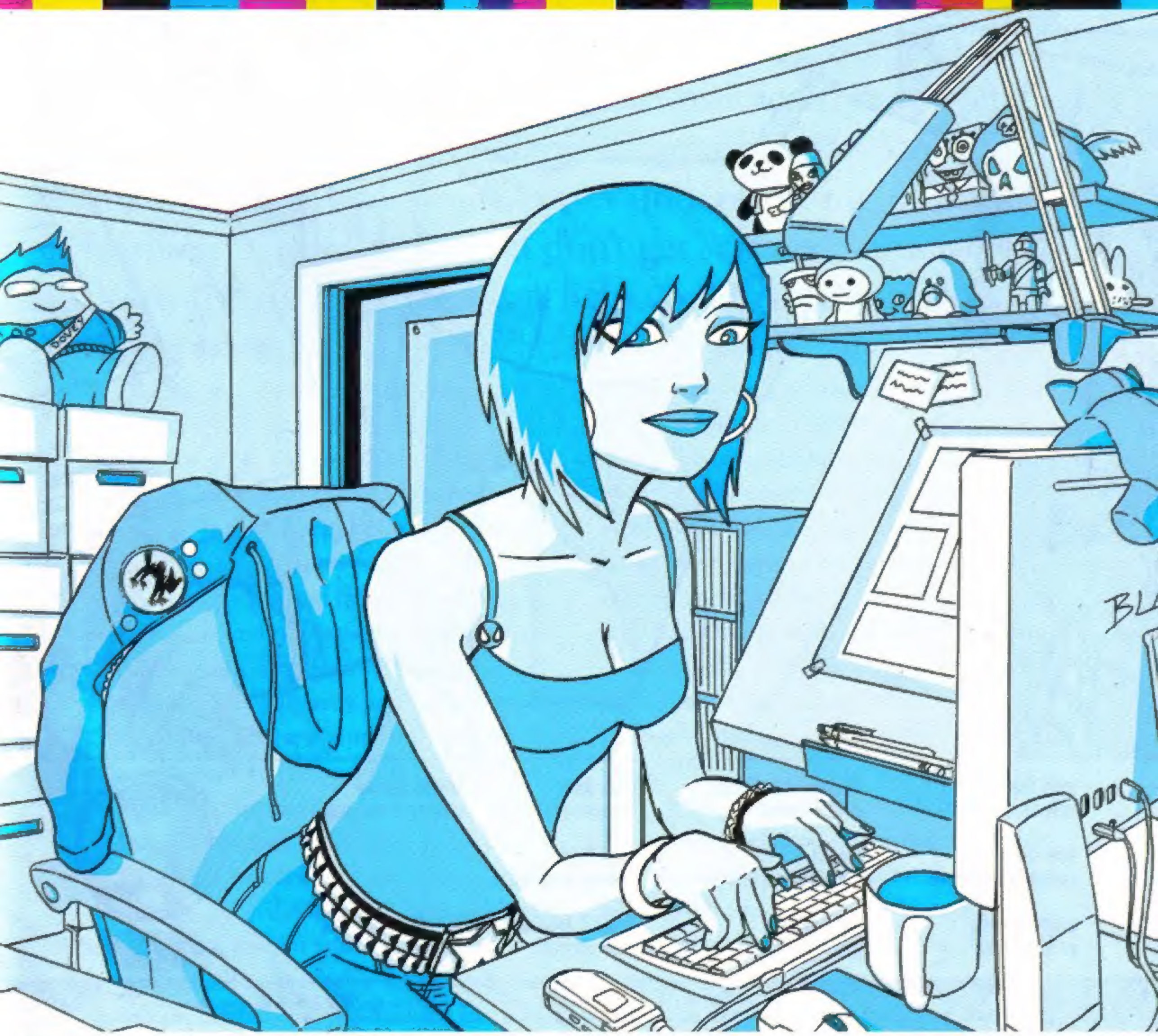
devil's due publishing

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH COMICS

...NOT JUST CREATE THEM

Vol. 1 of 4: Building the Infrastructure



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INTRODUCTION

SINCE YOU'VE PICKED UP THIS BOOK, you have most likely at least pondered publishing your own comic, manga or graphic novel. Maybe you're a creator seeking a better understanding of the business of comics, so you don't get screwed somewhere down the line. I hope I can help you! Either way, you might be wondering, "Who the hell is this guy?"

I'll let you make up your mind on your own whether or not I'm someone you actually want to listen to, and either take this to the register, or quickly put it back on the shelf before the clerk yells that, "this store ain't a library!"

I've finally surpassed the ten year mark bouncing around this industry (and I've probably aged twenty years in that time), so I feel like I can actually pass on a bit of knowledge to help one enter the crazy world of comics, and maybe save him or her a few gray hairs in the process.

I wear a few hats, the largest of which is that of the president of Devil's Due Publishing, Inc. (the company that published this very text, and for which I'm most widely known). DDP, as our fans affectionately named us, is based out of Chicago, and we produce a variety of comics – everything from major licensed properties to wacky books about penguin superheroes and a little boy who turns into a werewolf. We're solidly listed in the Top Ten list of the industry's leading distributor, Diamond, and employ about a dozen key staff members at our hub. In addition, we employ anywhere from twenty to fifty freelance contractors at any given time. The company was founded in 1999 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and later officially incorporated in 2002 in the state of Illinois.

In 2004, I expanded the company to offer creative services, something I couldn't pass up, having access to so much amazing talent. We wouldn't become "agents" that find an artist, and then go hunting for work, instead, we'd hunt for the work, and then contact artists capable of handling the gig.

In 2005, I officially spun that division off as a new entity, merging with another small firm that specialized in more corporate, conservative jobs: corporate websites, brand strategy… that kinda stuff. The new company is called Kunoichi, Inc., and does everything from websites for the US government and construction companies to toy designs and video game illustration.

In 2005, my Kunoichi partner and I also approached the publisher of a really cool small press magazine ripe with potential. Having grown bored with the standard comic magazine fare, this little publication called LO-FI: Comics and Entertainment magazine seemed like the kind of mag I'd have made if I had taken that path instead of comics. Without going into the details, we formed a partnership with the owner, and as of January '06, are releasing it monthly under the Devil's Due banner.

Unrelated to the comics business, I've been dabbling in small real estate investments for the past couple of years, and plan to increase my efforts in that area in the future.

That's me in a nutshell. My hobby is my job is my life. It's all I really do, and I enjoy it. I guess you could say I'm addicted to it. In Donald Trump's book, The Art of the Deal, he wrote that most driven, or highly successful people have a sort of "controlled neurosis" that they just manage to channel constructively. That sounds pretty close to the truth. I'm not your typical corporate type, which sometimes proves to be a challenge when dealing with those firmly entrenched in corporate America. Yet I have to confess that sometimes I like being underestimated. Maybe that's just me.

If I'm not working, I'm either finally getting around to catching a punk rock, psychobilly, hip hop or ska show, or hitting one of Chicago's many bars or clubs. Oh, or forcing myself into the gym, to make up for damaging myself at said bars and clubs. I wouldn't have it any other way right now. Maybe someday it'll be time to settle down, but right now I'm having too much fun.

The important thing is that it all started in in 1995, with a few hundred bucks I saved from random crappy high school jobs, and a few more bucks I managed to borrow from my dad and my uncle (some would trace it back to three little penguin toys my mom made for me when I was six, that I felt compelled to draw stories about, adding guns and grenades in the mix, or my Dad's Conan comic collection, but I'd say that '95 was the official kick-off).

Both of my parents came from very poor backgrounds financially, and my stepdad was from a hardworking modest background. I got some help along the way, but I wasn't getting any free rides - the most my parents could offer me was encouragement, which they did in abundance. Don't get me wrong, I don't claim to have ever been poor - I was very well taken care of. As time went on, they've really built nice lifestyles for themselves a hundred times better than what they started with. I was able to get some help through college, and spare cash here and there, but for the most part even if I could have it, I didn't want everything handed to me. I guess my parents succeeded in instilling in me that I needed to take care of myself at a young age.

Regardless, I knew from DAY ONE that I wanted to be in this line of work. I knew I wanted to draw, write, create, since before I could read, and pursued these pie-in-the-sky goals every day. I began to seek publishing opportunities long before I was skilled enough to be published, and start interacting with small press companies as early as age 14. I attended the small local conventions, asked artists and self-publishers questions, and read everything I could find on the subject of breaking into comics. I received some great advice, but had some bad experiences as well.

By the time I was 18, I'd been misled and burnt by so many shady, fly-by-night types that I was compelled to blaze my own path. I pretty much devoted my entire life to that cause, and finally, at age 23, was able to go

full time as a genuine comic book publisher. So although this success may have appeared to happen overnight, it was actually nine years in the making.

I'm focusing on all of the encouragement I had, but there was more than enough negativity thrown in my face every day. Lots of teachers and peers thought I had a "cute little dream" that would go away once reality set in.

Now maybe you're just looking at fulfilling a dream of producing a short comic book series, and don't intend to quit your day job. Maybe you're almost obsessive about making it in this business just like I was. Either way, it's going to take an AMAZING amount of dedication to see it through.

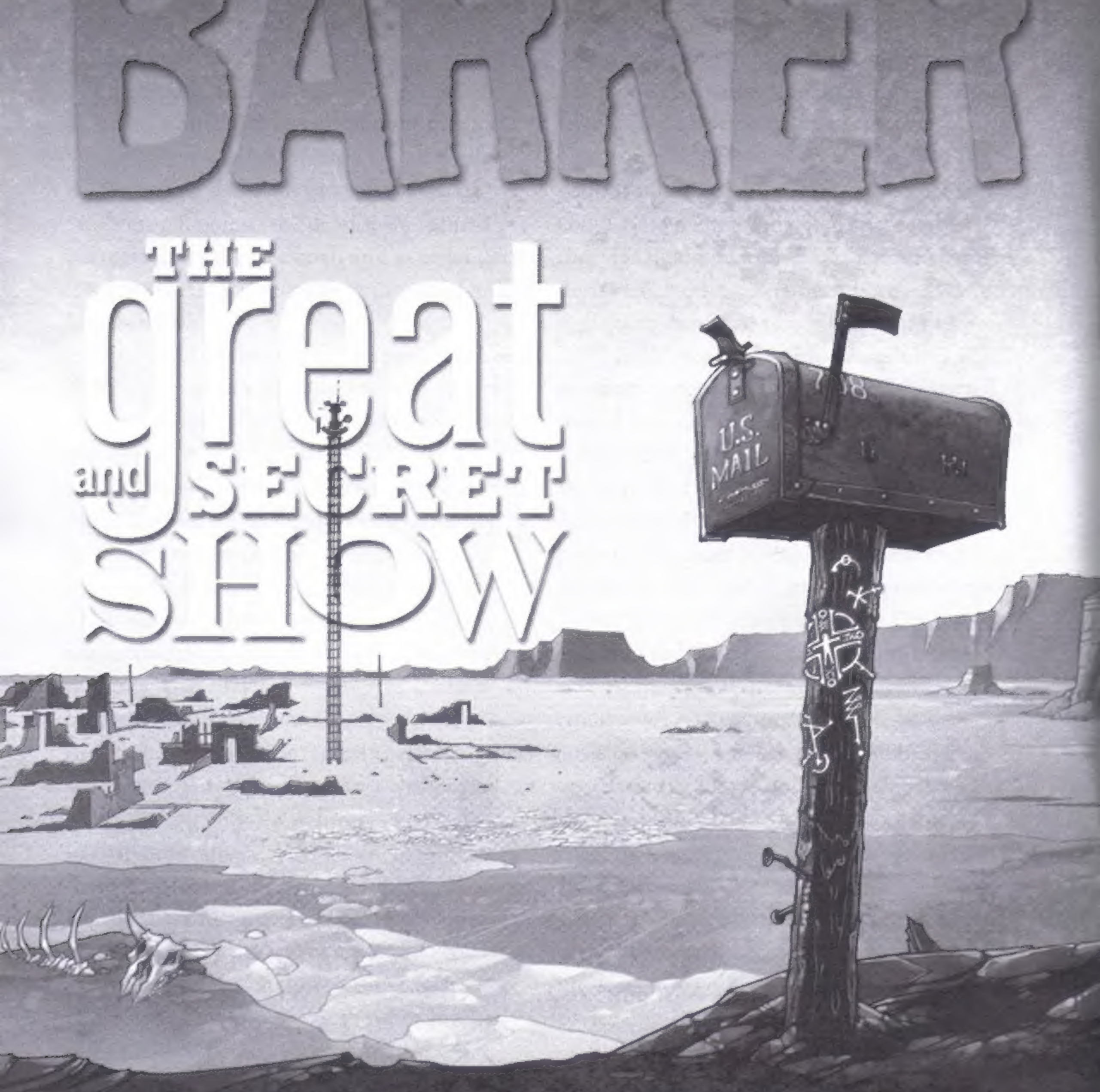
Unless you're one of those one-in-a-million lucky bastards that success seems to follow despite your lack of effort… Damn you people.

Just kidding…

…Well, only a little.

CLIVE BARKER

THE great and SECRET SHOW



IT BEGINS HERE! THE ADAPTATION OF MASTER OF HORROR **CLIVE BARKER'S** EPIC JOURNEY INTO THE FANTASTIC, ***THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW.*** ADAPTED BY **CHRIS RYALL** *(SHAUN OF THE DEAD)* AND ARTIST **GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ** *(LAND OF THE DEAD)*, THIS DEBUT ISSUE PRESENTS THE BEGINNING OF A BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL THAT WILL SPAN MANY DECADES AND DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS. ISSUE 1 WILL FEATURE TWO SPECIAL COVERS BY RODRIGUEZ.

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CHAPTER ONE: BUILDING YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE

DETERMINE *WHY* YOU'RE DOING THIS.

SO YOU HAVE THAT HAUNTING, NAGGING, passionate desire to publish your own manga or comic book, and you just can't shake it. Well, you poor bastard, WELCOME TO THE CLUB!

There are a few key elements you'll need to achieve your goal. When you've accomplished these things, you'll not only be financially and physically prepared to publish your own comic book, but you'll know you're mentally prepared too.

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to question just exactly why you're self-publishing. Do you just want to produce a short term vanity project? Are you hoping to catch the eye of a larger publisher and land a writing or illustration gig? Do you want to defy all odds and create your own profitable manga publishing company?

Answering these questions will save you lots of wasted time stumbling around for months with no direction. I see so many people in this industry who've been showing up at conventions pushing the same mini-comic they drew seven years ago, still wondering why they can't get hired. I'm not knocking people who simply want to produce a small zine because they 100% enjoy it, and don't need to make a living off of it, but don't be one of the people who can't let go of a bad idea, or worse, someone oblivious to the dedication it takes to reach the professional level.

Then there are guys like Robert Kirkman, who started out publishing a goofy black and white comic called Battle Pope. He parlayed relationships established through conventions to convince Erik Larsen at Image Comics to allow him to use one of his "sleeper" characters (one that had a fan following, but wasn't being used), called Super Patriot. From there, Kirkman did more Image projects, and a few years later had two solid titles in production, both of which he still owns, at least in part, to this date. His Image work has since led to other work from Marvel Comics.

I don't know if Rob planned that from the beginning, or if he realized the genius of his master plan only after the fact, but if it hadn't succeeded, I don't think he would still be trying to sell old copies of Battle Pope #1

Do you just want to produce a short term vanity project? Are you hoping to catch the eye of a larger publisher and land a writing or illustration gig? Do you want to defy all odds and create your own profitable manga publishing company?

in 2005. He had goals, and that kept him moving forward.

Additionally you've got guys who relentlessly pursue publishing their own characters for years with little recognition, and then actually blow up, achieving success. Dave Sim, the KING of self-publishing, is a role model when it comes to this. He started in 1977 with his book CEREBUS, and published THREE HUNDRED issues. Three friggin' hundred. There's also Drew Hayes of Poison Elves, Dave Lapham of Stray Bullets, Terry Moore of Strangers in Paradise, and more. Some of these books are out of production, but it's worth reading up on them. More recently, some online strips, like MEGATOKYO, have made the transition from web to print after developing a huge following online. The magazine to internet changeover opens a whole new realm of possibilities.

There is no right or wrong way to do it, just varying degrees of difficulty. But if you seriously contemplate the motivations and goals behind what you're doing, it will be easier to stick to your guns when the going gets tough months down the line. And the going WILL get tough… even if it's just food poisoning from some Chalupa you ate at Taco Bell off of the highway while driving to the Pittsburgh Comicon.

LINE UP YOUR SUPPLIERS AND TECHNOLOGY

NO ONE CAN MAKE COMIC BOOKS WITHOUT a professional printer, and unless you're from the dark ages of 1995, you're going to need a computer too. Most printers want computer files delivered as solid Tiffs or PDF files, and if they don't, they'll probably charge you extra to prepare the files themselves.

If you aren't familiar with basic graphic design programs like Adobe Photoshop or InDesign, or if my mentioning of Tiffs and PDFs just made you wonder what foreign language I was using, you need to bring a graphic designer into your fold. My next volume of H2SPC:NJCT focuses on building your team, (available of course from Devil's Due Publishing).

The industry's leading comic book printer, the one the big boys use, is QUEBECOR. They are a huge operation based out of Canada. They have multiple plants, and print a hell of a lot more than comic books. That's who we use almost exclusively at my company, for a number of reasons. One of the advantages of using Quebecor is that the industry's main DISTRIBUTOR picks books up from them every week. Thus, you can greatly reduce your shipping bill by avoiding a large international FedEx Ground bill.

There are a number of other old standbys, including Brenner Printing in Texas, Transcontinental in Canada, Morgan Printing, and becoming more common these days, Far Eastern print brokers. With the growing global market, China, Korea, and Malaysia are challenging Western printers with high quality and affordable pricing. The only problem is that it can take a LONG time to get your books over on the slow boat, and it's very difficult to get credit terms.

If you're just looking for a small run, you might want to contact some local printers as well. Printing technology is evolving every day, with smaller printers offering better and better, more affordable products. I'm sure that eventually I'll have to go back and revise that paragraph above that refers to printers preferring PDF files, because something else

will take their place. The important thing is to call around and get quotes from at least three different companies. That's the only way you're going to know if you're getting hosed or not…

…and we all know getting hosed is a bad thing.

Once you know which printer you want to go with, you can secure a quote via fax or email, and unless paper prices change, you can be sure that you now have a fair estimate of what printing will cost when the time comes.

If you're really serious about printing a professional, sellable comic, you should look into acquiring a UPC number and bar code for each issue you release. If you're only putting out one series, this may not be worth it to you, but if you plan to develop a line of comics, retailers will be able to better track the sales of your books, and place reorders accordingly. As of press time, the main distributor in the industry, Diamond, doesn't require this for comic books, but that doesn't mean that they haven't changed that policy by the time you read this.

If you are producing a graphic novel, a higher page count book, for release to book stores (outside of the insulated world of comic book shops), you MUST have an ISBN number.

UPC? ISBN? Why didn't Mom ever tell me I actually needed to know what those were for?! Simply put, Universal Product Codes can identify ANY product: comics, CDs, Pop Tarts, you name it. If it's for sale, it has a UPC. International Standard Book Numbers are specifically for the book industry, and only apply to books. Not the small floppy comic books, not magazines – just books or graphic novels.

To acquire a UPC or ISBN visit www.GS1.com and read to your heart's content.

Lastly, we've mentioned shipping quite a bit. Unless you plan to use the US Postal Service (the thought of which makes me shudder), you'll need a FedEx, UPS, or DHL account to transport your printed comics, original artwork, or any important documents. It's easy to get an account, and you can even save 10% by filling out shipment forms online. It's still pricey, but not as pricey as losing a piece of art. Once you have an account number established, you can ship from any drop-off location, or arrange for a pick-up, and just be billed later.

Unless you plan to use the US Postal Service (the thought of which **makes me shudder**), you'll need a FedEx, UPS, or DHL account to transport your printed comics, original artwork, or any important documents.

Sometimes special groups allow you to get even higher discounts. For instance, my membership with USAA insurance provides enormous savings for the entire company. Who'd a thunk it?

I suggest getting accounts with all three delivery services, and then use their quotes to negotiate better prices with one of them. They're not going to fight TOO hard for the business of just one person, but with Devil's Due, UPS and FedEx have fought for our business so hard that we're getting rates cheaper than the Post Office prices in some cases. It never hurts to start developing your track record with them as early as possible.

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DISTRIBUTION: THE DIRECT MARKET

THE DIRECT MARKET IS THE TERM GIVEN to the distribution system that supplies comics and manga to nearly every comic book shop in the country. Whereas in most other aspects of the publishing industry, every sale can be returned by the stores for a full refund, the Direct Market sales are **NON-RETURNABLE.** This provides a big advantage to publishers, because once a sale is executed, the garnered money is theirs to keep. However, retailers are also less likely to take a risk on a new series if they fear they will be stuck with copies on the shelves a month later.

The Direct Market, give-or-take, is easier in some ways than people may think, yet harder in other ways than one would ever suspect. It's important to differentiate the areas of comic book distribution, and graphic novel distribution, which I'll explain separately.

There are a few smaller distributors out there these days, like FM distribution, for example, but the one distributor who dominates EVERYTHING in the comic book industry is DIAMOND COMIC DISTRIBUTORS. There's a very good chance you picked this very book up from someone who ordered it through Diamond. I can't think of any other industry where this is the case, which makes comic books an interesting market to be in, for sure.

The good part of acquiring distribution for your comics is that this makes things easier to be included in a catalog that goes to virtually EVERY retailer in the comic book industry. The process is fairly simple.

You start by applying for a vendor account through Diamond. You can contact them through their website, www.diamondcomics.com,

acquire their phone number from there, and call them to find out what to do.

They will want to see a sample of your product, so be prepared to send them samples of your art, accompanied by lettering, and the overall **TRADE DRESS** ("trade dress" is the information you put on your comics' covers: the story logo, your company logo, the UPC or ISBN code, issue number, etc.) of your comic book series. Recently, Diamond announced they are placing tougher requirements on the products they solicit, and all product must bring in a certain amount of sales to continue being listed. The general consensus is that this is an effort to thin their catalog a bit, and improve the overall sales of the titles that *are* listed, which brings me to my next point.

The *bad* part of only having one main catalog is that although it's easy to be included, and get the word out to every comic shop in North America, *everyone else is in there too!* The competition is fierce, and there are hundreds and hundreds of other products from other companies competing for the retailer dollar. Making it even tougher, there are four **PREMIER VENDORS** who get premium placement in the catalogs, before all others. Those would be Marvel, who print their own special supplement catalog each month, DC Comics, Image Comics, and Dark Horse Comics.

This creates an enormous challenge for new guys to break in, and harder to be noticed by the retailers. Still, some people manage to pull it off, and if you use your imagination, you can too. My point is, ***success might not have anything to do with your actual product.*** An awesome comic book isn't good enough. Unless you think of the most effective ways to get the word out about it, no one will even know the book exists.

I've met more than a few guys in my day who come to me with excitement about their latest comic book endeavor—their new self-publishing venture that is going to turn the world on its ear. When talking with them

DISTRIBUTOR WARS!

The distribution scenario was not always like it is today. Once, long ago, in the era known as the '80s, there were many many small distributors. Like any business, they began to consolidate as the more efficient companies bought out the smaller companies, or put them out of business via competition. When I first started to educate myself on this subject in 1991, as an ambitious ninth grader, there were about a dozen distributors.

By the mid nineties, that number narrowed to just a scant few serious players. Heroes World, Friendly Frank's, Capital, and Diamond, were some of the largest distributors during the comics boom of the '90s, when small press publishers were selling tens of thousands of copies of amateur black and white product. Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, and the newly formed Image Comics were selling *millions* of copies every month.

That's when Marvel decided they were so big that they didn't *need* a distributor. They were going to distribute themselves. They acquired Heroes World, and were converting it into a Marvel-only distributor. Suddenly the industry was abuzz with chatter. Friendly Frank's went out of business, and we were left with three giant distribution powerhouses.

Then something happened that took everyone by surprise. From what I understand, feeling they needed their own special distribution deal to compete, DC Comics signed a major exclusive contract with Diamond. In that instant, the distribution wars hit nuclear level. I remember wondering, even at the age of 16, why on Earth DC would do such a thing: they could have been the darlings of the industry, and had the might of every distributor, while Marvel struggled to go it alone.

In hindsight, I can now see where they were coming from, although anyone

further, I find that what they are excited about is that Diamond accepted their product for distribution.

Man, these guys are in for a world of disappointment.

Before I sound cruel or unsympathetic, I believe it *is* a good thing being accepted, but you need to set higher expectations for yourself. Getting accepted by Diamond, or any distributor, is a *necessity*, not a bonus. This is a deal for *distribution*, not *publishing*. All the distributor is saying to you is that it is willing to offer your product to retailers who may then place orders, after which they will buy that product from you. You're still paying the bills for the creators, the printing, shipping, and any advertising you decide to do.

This is a tough, tough business, so if you're excited about getting distributed, you are most likely not mentally prepared for the challenges to come ahead. Think of it this way: would you be excited because a printer agreed to let you pay them to print your comics? Or that FedEx agreed to ship them? Of course not. That's just what's *required* to build the infrastructure you'll need to self-publish.

A very blunt note: if you have been rejected by the distributor, that means the distributor feels that your product is not anywhere near a professional level, and is unlikely to generate even a few hundred dollars in sales. Their requirements aren't really that strict, so a rejection means you need to take a serious look at your comic book. It's most likely nowhere near the professional level it needs to be, and you need to be honest with yourself about the quality of what you've put together.

Don't give up. *Improve* your product and yourself. Ask questions, like "*Why* didn't the distributor accept my comic?" and "*What* should I do to make it better?" Constructive criticism is what *constructs* successful people.

Once you've shown the distributor your product for review, and been accepted, you

paying attention could foresee that Marvel was not likely going to succeed. I think it was a knee-jerk, shortsighted move, and definitely not the best decision for the industry. That's when Capital was forced to make a move and try to acquire its own exclusive publishers. Kitchen Sink and Viz signed with Capital, and now, in order to receive all of the top product in the market, store managers were forced to order from all three distributors, whereas they had previously been able to use just one if they so desired.

The loss of both Marvel and DC was too great, though, and Capital shut its doors in 1996, negotiating a deal with Diamond. It was now down to Diamond and Heroes World.

Meanwhile, Marvel wasn't faring so well with the distribution venture. To put it delicately, they fell flat on their face, and came crawling back, only to find an industry with very few, if any, alternative choices for quality distribution. They signed their deal with Diamond, and remain exclusive with them for the Hobby/Collector shops to this day. For an even more in-depth, and very fascinating, look into the Marvel Comics of the 1990s, read a book called *Comic Wars* by Dan Raviv, available in most bookstores and comic shops.

So *this* is why, when you're flipping through the *Previews* catalog every month, you see those top four premier vendors ahead of everyone else in the catalog. As most people, including myself, understand it, these publishers have been grandfathered in with their exclusive agreements. Will they ever leave? It's doubtful. There would have to be a viable alternative in place for them to do so, and as long as they are exclusive, it's hard for any aspiring distributors to sustain themselves. It's a Catch-22 any way you look at it.

Does this make Diamond the "Big

an attorney to make sure you understand everything that is included in the document. For larger distributors, like Diamond, you don't have much bargaining room, because you're not going to be generating a serious amount of money for them.

Larger publishers may negotiate deals for more favorable terms, but that is ONLY because they are bringing major dollars in every month. If your self-publishing efforts succeed, you can always approach them to discuss new terms. Remember, this is BUSINESS, and it's about give and take. The less you have to offer, the less you can expect them to give.

Another interesting aspect of the Direct Market is the ordering system used by Diamond. This is the system common (and probably unique) to the comic book industry, in which catalogs are released every month to the retailers for items shipping about two months in the future. Catalogs are also sold to consumers at the stores, who can see all of the exciting goodies coming out. Retailers review these items and decide what they want to take a chance on ordering. Hopefully, they see your comic, and decide to try it out.

Let me clarify that: almost all new comics offered in the catalog WILL NOT BE PRINTED for almost two months.

Again, whatever they buy is NON-RETURNABLE. If it does not sell, they are stuck with it. This is why almost every comic book shop in North America has subscription services, or "pull boxes." Customers buy the catalogs (Diamond's is called PREVIEWS), decide what they want, and place an order with the store clerk. Every Wednesday, when new comic books arrive, customers come in and pick up the stack of comics in their pull box. Many comics readers don't even look at the racks.

This system started about twenty years ago, and became a phenomenon unique to the comic book industry. Go into any comic book shop on a Wednesday, and you'll see people from all walks of life strolling in to buy their weekly comics. Business professionals, art students, service industry workers, men, women, black, white, Latino. I like to call these people the "Wednesday Society," or the "Wednesday Rebels." You're probably one of 'em, as am I. All we're missing are secret rings. Hmmm... maybe... Green Lantern rings... or not.

A long time ago this was great for publishers, distributors and stores alike. The comic book industry was very strong, and it allowed everyone a guaranteed way to make money (even some people sadly lacking in business skills). Today, though, there are fewer shops than there were ten years ago, and it has become a system that's eating itself. We're seeing a trend where the real growth is with graphic novels in the RETURNABLE market, but I'll go into that soon.

were simply the victors in the process of capitalism. Many contest that they are a monopoly, and it was even investigated by the Federal government, which later dropped the case.

Do I wish there was a little more competition? It'd be nice, but you have to work within the reality you live. Devil's Due has an exclusive contract with Diamond as well. It just makes sense. We have a very strong relationship with them, and work closely with our account reps and their sales and marketing staff regarding all of our product. Sometimes being the only guy on the block makes them easy prey for unsatisfied customers, though. (Covered my rear there, whew!)

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G.I. JOE

TRANSFORMERS

THE ART OF WAR

MARCH 2006

DDP

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SOLICITATION INFORMATION

YOUR SOLICITATION INFORMATION IS DUE to distributors about two months before their catalogs hits the stands. Solicitation Information is all of the information and graphics that are needed to inform people about your comic book—which usually includes: the name of the writer and artist(s); price; frequency of publication; and an image of the cover. This means you need to know and have all of this content ***four months*** before your book is set to debut.

You can start to see how much money companies must invest in a comic book series before they start to see a return.

About one month before your book's street date, you'll receive your orders from the distributor, explaining how many copies they wish to buy from you. This lets you know how many guaranteed sales you have. After judging how many reorder sales, convention sales, website sales, and promotional copies you anticipate needing, you'll be prepared to set your print run. It's important to have your computer files ready to go to the printer as soon as you get your orders. At Devil's Due, we usually have our files to the printer BEFORE we receive our orders, waiting to give the printer the "green light."

Your orders will arrive in the form of a PURCHASE ORDER. It's basically a promissory note that ensures you will be paid as long as you deliver the product in time, and as advertised. This contains important information to include in the instructions you send to your printer, because it gives them a breakdown of which warehouses to send comics to for each distributor. For example, Diamond has warehouses in Memphis, Tennessee, Plattsburgh, New York, and more, making it possible to get the books out to every store in the continent on the same day.

If you use Quebecor, the comic industry's largest print supplier, they actually have

So you've reached this point. **You've done it!** Your comic is on the way to the shops, and your fingers are crossed, hoping it sells well enough that retailers reorder more, and that the next issue's advanced orders are higher.

trucks that pick books up every Wednesday morning. Rather than paying to ship the books to Diamond, Diamond charges you a small percentage of the retail price of your book. Your check from them will be slightly smaller, but it's a very handy way to save some money on shipping costs, AND a way to leverage their resources; i.e.: you're not paying for shipping in advance, out of your own pocket.

So you've reached this point. You've DONE it! Your comic is on the way to the shops, and your fingers are crossed, hoping it sells well enough that retailers reorder more, and that the next issue's advanced orders are higher.

Keep in mind, that if you're doing a monthly publication, retailers will have to order the first three issues before they even receive issue one. This makes their orders much more conservative on issues one and two. For this reason, if you're a completely unknown creator or company, I suggest you consider releasing your comic on a bimonthly (once every two months), or even quarterly schedule at first. This allows more time for the comics to be purchased, and for word of mouth to circulate before issue two orders are due. Remember, most of your orders from comic shops are going to come from pull boxes.

Your check arrives about a month after the comics hit the stands, and you've now experienced every stage of publishing in the direct market.* You are officially a comic book publisher.

*Don't forget to invoice your distributors! Some of them are good about paying you regardless, but you run the risk of not getting paid until 30 days after they receive your invoice, rather than your books. If you go a month without billing them, expecting your money, you may be in for a rude awakening. At the end of this issue is a sample of a basic bill. There are a number of very inexpensive accounting software packages these days to help you keep track of your expenses and income… although paper and pencil still work too!

DISTRIBUTION: BOOKSTORES

WHEN DISTRIBUTING YOUR COMIC BOOKS through bookstores, there are a lot of distributors out there. Diamond Book Distributors is one, and is a division separate from Diamond Comic Distributors, with different support staff.

Other options are CDS, Baker & Taylor, Amazon.com, Hastings, Ingram, and on and on. You can also sell to the major chains like Borders and Barnes & Noble. Devil's Due uses Diamond, so that is where the majority of my knowledge comes from. Diamond sub-distributes via many of the smaller distributors mentioned above. Again, you need to do what best makes sense for *you.*

In a future volume, I will go into more detail about marketing to the book market, which is very different than marketing to the comic book shops, but here are a few key points.

- *The Book Market is made up of key buyers for large chains.*
- *Book Market catalogs solicit months and months ahead—up to a year in advance—nlike the Direct Market's shorter four- to five-month window.*
- *The Book Market in general has a much larger percentage of female readers than the Direct Market, and a younger audience overall.*
- *The Book Market works heavily off of "backlist" sales, which means you can make even more money over the long term than right up front.*
- *The Catch-22 of the Book Market is that you can reach every major store in the country by selling to a select few chain buyers—but if those few buyers don't like your product, you're unlikely to get in those stores. The moral of the story:* don't *piss anyone off.*

It's *very* important to get to know the sales and marketing staff of your Book Market distributor. They are the ones who directly communicate with the buyers on a frequent basis, and they have hundreds of titles to sell, not just yours.

DISTRIBUTION: NEWSSTANDS

NEWSSTAND IS THE AVENUE OF DISTRIBUTION for periodicals (i.e.: monthly comics or magazines) such as the magazine rack at your local grocery store, or the comics you find in convenient stores. Even the comics and magazines on sale at book stores, such as Borders, are considered newsstand, and are separate from their more "book-like" counterparts, the graphic novel.

This is a whole other ball game, and one that I'm still learning about every day. In some ways dealing with these distributors has made me appreciate Diamond more, although I'm still excited about the opportunities that the newsstand offers. It is not something I would recommend to someone just starting out, though. Newsstand, like the Book Market, is 100% returnable.

I may cover Newsstand distribution in further detail in a future supplement, but for now I'll only touch on it, because it may have been an outlet you were planning to exploit.

DISTRIBUTION: ONLINE STORE

WHEN YOU'RE BEGINNING YOUR FIRST comic book or manga publishing endeavor, it's just a reality that it's going to be tough getting your book placed in stores. You need every penny you can get from these comics, and more importantly, a place that customers can ALWAYS find your product.

How many times have you been interested in a manga, magazine, or CD only to find that the stores in your area don't carry them? Do you pursue them after a couple of tries? After ONE try? Most likely not, unless you're already a big fan. That's why your online web store is so important. Can't do a full service web store yet? Get an E-Bay account and list items with the "buy it now" feature. It's no comparison to a true online shop, but it will get you moving in the right direction.

One way to increase revenues from web sales, and make going to your site to buy your product more worth your readers' time, is to offer subscriptions. It's hard enough to earn readers, so once you do, REEL them in for the long term. A four- or six-issue subscription not only brings you more money, but it guarantees they'll stick around to read your whole story.

Of course you MUST be very responsible if you sell subscriptions. The last thing you want to do is spend a customer's money, and then find that you won't be continuing your series past issue 2. You'll end up owing some very unhappy people a lot of money.

Above all, remember that your web store is not merely a sub-page on your website. It is the NEXUS of your website. The only reason your website exists is to market and SELL your product. Every aspect of it should help to achieve this goal.

KNOW YOUR KINKO'S

AHH, THE LOCAL COPY CENTER. WHETHER it's Kinko's, Office Max, or just Billy Bob's Big Beautiful Copies up the street, you want to know the employees at these shops: they are your BEST friends.

It's been a few years since I really needed to use a copy center; Devil's Due prints so many copies for printer mock-ups and general daily business use that it became much more cost effective for us to lease a full service hi-tech copier/scanner a long time ago. But I remember my copy center days vividly. I even worked at a Kinko's for a while during art school.

You're going to need to make copies for all sorts of reasons, and maybe even produce promotional mini-comics (called Ashcans) once you complete enough of your first issue.

Most of you reading this are probably already smirking from your own experiences spending long nights using the sweet Mac Design Station set-up at the copy shop your friend works at during third shift (which you still pay for, of course). I think Kinko's is a right of passage for pretty much every comic artist and publisher out there.

Another option is to take advantage of your high school, college, or job facilities if your superiors are supportive of your self-publishing efforts. Either way, there's no way to publish efficiently these days without some decent computer equipment and copy capabilities, so make sure you know where you're going to have access to them.

WITH THE FOUNDATION IN PLACE, YOU MAY NOW BUILD!

IF YOU'VE MADE IT THIS FAR, CONGRATULATIONS! You've done it! You have laid the foundation of the publishing infrastructure that you and your creative team will need to get your product out into the market. This is no small feat. By doing this, and not just blindly drawing or writing away hoping your comic will magically get published, you're ahead of about 80% of all other aspiring self-publishers. You're on your way to introduce your manga or comic to the world.

Maybe after all of your research, and adding the numbers, you've decided this is not the route you want to take. Maybe you'd prefer to simply focus on the creative side of things. Well, congratulations to you as well! You just saved yourself months of headaches, and potentially thousands of dollars. Did you know, though, that most creators have NO IDEA how the comics they create actually make it to the stands? It's shocking how little many know; even some thirty-year comics veterans are clueless to the publishing and distribution side of the industry. By educating yourself and putting in a little extra time on the side, you're better prepared to create comics professionally. You will have an understanding of your editor and publisher's points of view that most creators fail to have.

The next step in the publishing game is Marketing, followed by the creative process. "FOLLOWED by creative?" you may ask. Well, not always, but even though they are almost simultaneous events, you want to make sure you have your marketing infrastructure firmly in place so that you'll be able to keep up your promotional efforts without getting caught up in the creative work. Creative work is like a black hole that loves to suck you in, and keep you from maintaining the business side of things.

That's one of my personal strong points. And before it sounds like I have a big head,

It's OK to know what your strong points are, because **knowing your strong points also means knowing your weak points.**

and even worse, that my big head's up my ass, let me say I am NOT an amazing talent. I consider myself a pretty good artist when I really have the time to focus, and a solid writer, but I'm also able to tackle these chores while focusing on the business. The older I get, the more I realize that that ambidextrous ability to perform the left brain-right brain tag team is actually a unique ability. Usually it's one or the other. It's an old stereotype, but it really does seem that the more talented the creator, the more flakey they can be in terms of business. Then when you're dealing with someone right out of corporate America with an MBA in business management, they often don't have a creative bone in their body.

Even still, it is VERY difficult to switch gears during the day – jumping back and forth from creative writing or drawing to spreadsheets and administrative duties. It's just very difficult, because your brain needs a little while to get into the creative mindset, or into the "groove." Whenever I write, I have to go hide away at a coffee shop or on my condo building's rooftop room – anywhere away from distractions. If you CAN do both, even simultaneously, then take that talent and run with it. You've got me beat!

Everyone knows I'm using overall generalities, but my point is, it's OK to know what your strong points are, because knowing your strong points also means knowing your weak points. Are YOU that talented artist who can't even balance your own checkbook? Then get a partner who can! Are you the accountant who's always loved comics, but deep down inside, you know you're not a good writer? Don't let your own ego stand in the way of making a good comic. Hire someone who IS great, and have him expand upon your ideas. Everyone, even you, will be much happier with the end product.

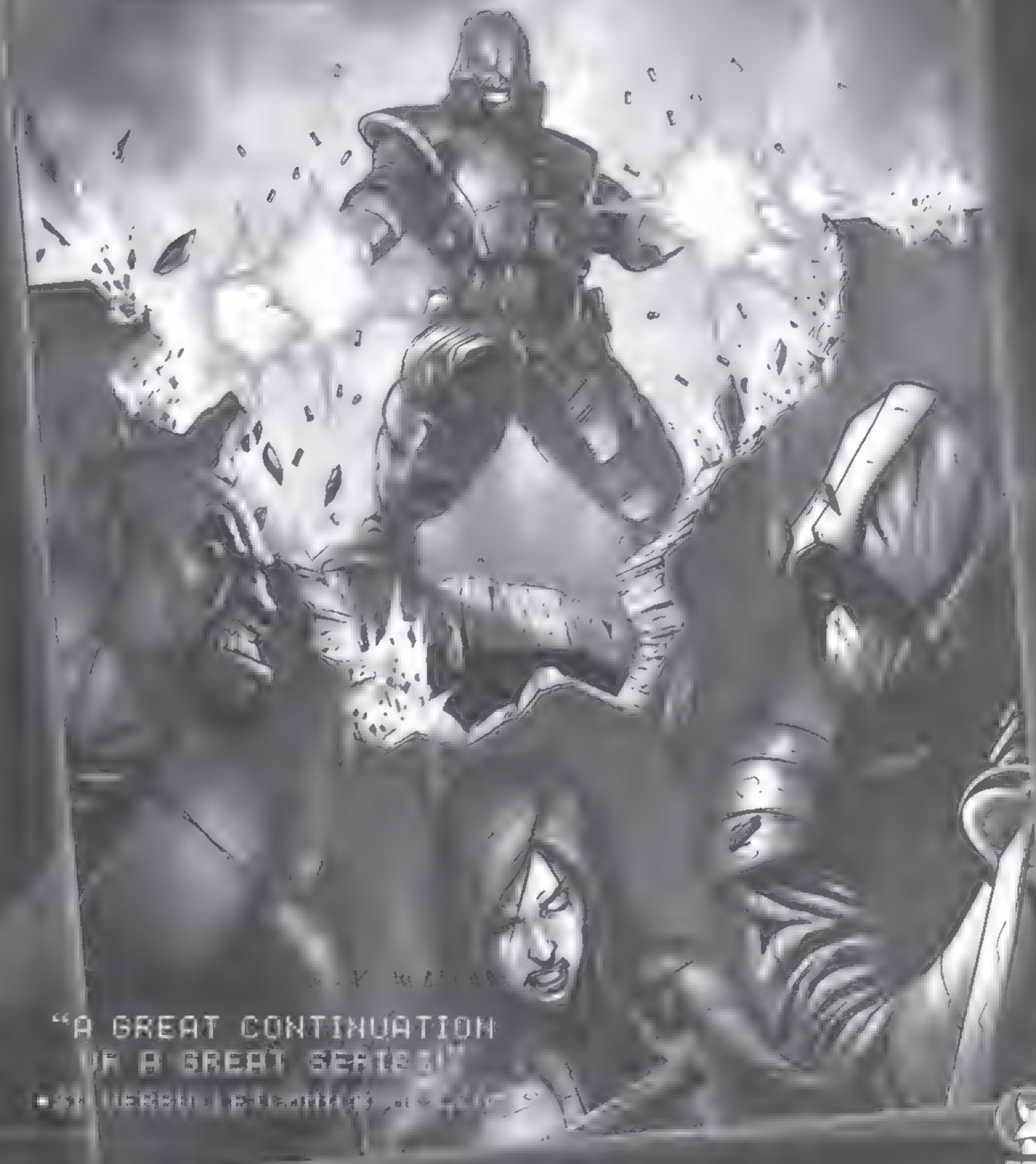
"But Josh," you're thinking, "I know I'm not that great, but it's what I really really want to do. The whole REASON I'm self-publishing is because I want to be an artist. I just need more practice." Well then by all means keep up your efforts to achieve your dream, but ask yourself again, why are you self-publishing? It's very time consuming, expensive, and draining. If you take another year to improve your talents BEFORE publishing, you'll have a product to be proud of, and never have to look back on those memories thinking "My God, what was I doing back then?" Trust me, I speak from personal experience! Ever heard of my first comic book called *Minotaur*? Probably not, and there's a good reason.

G.I. JOE ISSUE 3

G.I. JOE

AMERICA'S ELITE

"★★★★!"
COMICFANATIC.COM



"A GREAT CONTINUATION
OF A GREAT SERIES!"

THINGS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE
AS MAJOR BLUDD RETURNS!

AVAILABLE AT COMIC BOOK SHOPS NEAR YOU, OR VISIT WWW.DEVILSDUESTORE.COM, OPEN 24/7, TO GET THE LATEST DDP PRODUCTS!

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CLOSING

I HOPE THIS HAS BEEN HELPFUL FOR YOU.

Sometimes people take my comments or advice as harsh, or even a little mean, and that is the opposite of my intentions. This can be a tough industry, and if you jump into it without thinking, trust me that it will be a lot harsher than I've ever been. I'm trying to help ensure that your publishing experience is as exciting and fulfilling as possible.

This is exactly how I treat myself. I don't sugar coat things or try to paint a pretty picture when there isn't one. I think everyone that works for me knows I can't stand someone tip toeing around a problem, and appreciate an honest assessment of the situation. There simply isn't time to pussy-foot around issues. We call it like it is, and deal with the challenges that we face head on. What's great is that when you succeed, you know it's for real. And that's the best feeling of all.

Whether you continue reading this entire series, or decide to venture into the publishing arena from this point, good luck to you. I hope my rattling on has helped in some small way. Now get out there and start building your infrastructure. Make me regret writing this five years from now when I wish I could publish you, but you're already doing too well on your own to accept my offer!

Thanks for reading, and please join me next issue, when I go into detail about finding and signing your creative team.

How to Read a Printing Invoice

"Terms" identifies the amount of time you have to pay your bill. Some printers will demand payment in advance, but if you have solid credit, you should be able to arrange for 30 day payment terms—also known as "NET 30." In this example the option is also given to pay within 10 days of receipt, and receive a 2% discount.

MONTRE-ALL PRINT

FACTURE - INVOICE

Invoice number (sometimes called "Job number") is the number the printer will use to identify this specific job. Be sure to refer to it in all correspondence with the printer. This will ensure you appear organized and professional, as well as minimize the potential for accounting and shipping errors.

VENDU À/SOLD TO:

DEVIL'S DUE PUBLISHING INC.
461
SUI OD
CHI
606

Your business address shows up here. I've already claimed this one!

N° FACTURE / INVOICE NO

N° DOCUMENT CUSTOMER'S NO

COMMANDE N° / YOUR ORDER NO

N° DE TRAVAIL / JOB #

DATE DE LIVRAISON/SHIPPING DATE

01/21/05

2% 10 DAYS, NET 30

007

HERO WORSHIP #1
32 pg B&W

This is the title of your job—for our purposes, your book will be known as "Hero Worship." In this case, you've requested a quote for a 32 page, black and white comic. with color cover.

5,000 COPIES *4,000.00

ALL PRICES IN U.S. FUNDS

SHIPPING 500.00

TOTAL US $ 4,500.00

***Prices are not an accurate representation of printing costs. Consult a printer for actual costs.** This is a sample invoice for educational purposes only. The author and publisher recommend consulting legal and accounting advice from a registered and licensed professional before publishing. This and other forms are adapted from existing forms, some information has been altered, deleted or simplified for illustrative purposes.

How to Read a Printer Quote

Binding commonly comes in 2 formats: ***Saddle-Stitched***, which means stapled, like most 32pg comics; or ***Perfect Bound***, which has a spine, more like a traditional book.

4/4 represents the 4 ink colors used in the printing process (4-color printing = full color printing), on each side of the paper. 4/1 would mean 4 color on one side, and 1 color (probably black) on the other side of the paper. *1/1* means a black & white book.

This number is how the printer identifies this specific job. Since they negotiate prices with each customer, your rate may differ from someone else's, thus making this number vital to tracking.

Bleed means that the art goes right up to the page edge. Covers are almost always full bleed; interiors don't have to be full bleed--but if you want even 1 page of your comic to bleed off the edge, then your whole book will be considered ***full bleed***.

RE-ALL PRINT

QUOTATION

Quotation # **2063-3-JL**

These are your print dimensions. ***Make sure*** the book is the size you want.

Title : HERO WORSHIP #1

We are pleased to present our quotation for the production of the above title.

Size :	Final	5" x 7 1/2"	Open size : 10" x 7 1/2"
Pages :	Inside	: 144 pages	
	Cover	: 4 pages	
Printing :	Inside	: 1/1 bleed	
	Cover	: 4/4 bleed + U.V. gloss 1 side	
Paper :	Inside	Windsor Offset # 2 Smooth Finish 60 Lbs	
	Cover	Carolina C1C 12 Pts	
Binding :	Perfect bound		
Material suppplied : (by customer)	Disk Syquest Quark-X-Press in design Macintosh Proofs supplied		
Packing :	In cartons on skids		
Currency :	All in U.S. funds		

This is your ***page count***. Comics pages are printed in groups of 8, meaning you must have 24 pgs, 32 pgs, 40 pgs, etc. Standard size is 32 pgs for a $2.95 book. Your cover is considered an additional 4 pgs: Front, Inside Front, Inside Back, and Back.

How your comics will be shipped. A ***skid*** is one forklift pallet.

This is the ***kind*** of paper used. Ask your printer for samples.

Tolerance : + ou - 2 %
Price : Valid for a thirty days period

Total Quantity :	1,000	3,000	5,000	10 000
Total Price :	$3500	$5500	$6500	$8000
Price / 1000's .				
Add'l / 1000's				

Total Quantity :	15000	20000
Total Price :	$9500	$10,500
Price / 1000's :		
Add'l / 1000's :		

As your print quantity goes up, the cost per unit goes down considerably!

Price confirmations are subject to paper price and availability effective at time of order

ntative

Customer signature

Date

owledge having read the terms and conditions set forth on the above and accept constituting the printing contract.

Printing presses are so complex and fast-moving that they work in approximate quantities. This disclaimer allows the printer to charge you 2% more or less, based on the quantity they print.

Prices are not an accurate representation of printing costs. Consult a printer for actual costs. This is a sample invoice for educational pruposes only. The author and publisher recommend consulting legal and accounting advice from a registered and licensed professional before publishing. This and other forms are adapted from existing forms; some information has been altered, deleted or simplified for illustrative purposes.

How to Read a Purchase Order

This is the P.O.# It is what you use for all invoicing. Note that we include the P.O.# as on the Distributor Invoice.

PURCHASE ORDER #125621

ISSUED TO:

Your company contact info here.

SHIP TO:

Please ship to location(s) listed below

INVOICE TO:

IAM COMIC DISTRIBUTORS
Attn: Accounts Payable

This is where to send your invoice. It's a good idea to fax or email *and* send via snail mail.

ISSUE DATE 11/25/05 TERMS NET 30

Agreed upon payment terms. In this example, the distributor will pay you within 30 days of receiving comics.

NOTE Ship as ready Please include purchase order number on all shipments and invoices
This order is subject to the purchase order terms on file with your company. Refer to such terms in the placement of this order.

LN 0001: HERO WORSHIP #1
NOTE: INITIAL ORDER FULFILLMENT

ITEM NO: AUG05335 PROD ID: PLEASE PROVIDE
RETAIL PRICE: $2.95
UNIT PRICE: $1.18
IN STORE DATE: 10/26/05 CANCEL DATE: 12/09/05

When your book is scheduled to arrive in stores.

Please ship the qty listed to location(s) below

QTY
2,000 Salem W'house

TOTAL QTY 2,000 COST: $2360

SUMMARY TOTAL QTY 2,000 COST: $2360

Price you'll be paid for each copy, usually *60% off* your retail price. In this case, your book is retailing for $2.95. $2.95 x 40% = $1.18.

Total number of comics you'll be shipping.

Total price you'll be paid. 1000 comics x 40% = $1180.

A breakdown of how many copies are to be sent to each distributor warehouse. There may be several, and it's important for your printer to receive this info for shipping.

This is the number the distributor assigns to your comic for that specific issue. When you *invoice* them, be sure to refer to this number.

Date the distributor can *CANCEL* the order if comics aren't received.

Prices are not an accurate representation of printing costs. Consult a printer for actual costs. This is a sample invoice for educational pruposes only. The author and publisher recommend consulting legal and accounting advice from a registered and licensed professional before publishing. This and other forms are adapted from existing forms, some information has been altered, deleted or simplified for illustrative purposes.

Invoicing the Distributors

Include the corresponding numbers from your Purchase Order here.

State the agreed-upon amount of days the customer has to pay you.

Every communication about this book should include the Invoice Number. You will generate this # yourself.

Your address.

Invoice

Date	Invoice #

Bill To

Include customer's name, address and phone number here.

Include extra info space to identify what you're charging for if necessary, such as a project #. This doesn't always apply, though.

P O No	Terms	Project
125621	NET 30	

Description	Qty	Rate	Amount
AUG05335 HERO WORSHIP #1	2,000	1.18	$2360

This is the Item Number. Item Nos are attached to your title/issue much like the Purchase Order Number.

# of comics the distributor ordered.

Cost you are charging distributor per copy (in dollars)

List the project you're charging for here. Every issue of every title should be listed separately—*never* group orders for multiple items under the same listing.

Total	$2360
Payments/Credits	$ 500
Balance Due	$2860

Do you owe this distributor money, or do they owe you from a previous invoice? Include that info here. For this example, we'll pretend they owe us $500.

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ANNOUNCING THE SELF-PUBLISHING

HELPING HAND CONTEST!

In celebration of this four-part series, Devil's Due Publishing is holding a contest! The Grand Prize winner will receive a free one-on-one consultation from Josh Blaylock, during his or her self-publishing experience. The consultation consists of 1/2 hour phone calls once a week for two months, as the winner builds an infrastructure, establishes a marketing plan, and sends that first comic book off to the press. Preliminary and follow-up phone calls and emails will be arranged to make the most of the two month consultation period.

What do you need to do?

This isn't an art contest; it's MUCH MUCH MORE! Blaylock not only wants to see your artists' and writers' samples, but your business plan as well. While purchasing *How to Self-Publish Comics: Not Just Create Them*, is not necessary to enter, entries will be judged based on the topics discussed in the series. Each entry should include your plan for setting up your infrastructure, signing your creative team, marketing goals, and how you plan to keep the momentum going once your comic book is on the stands.

The contest deadline is not until June 15th, 2006, so please do not rush any submissions. Take your time, and do it right. Submissions will not be viewed until May. The winning entry will be announced by the end of June.

Two runners-up will receive a one-time 1/2 hour consultation session with Blaylock. The grand prize is priceless, but even these one-time sessions can save you hours of time and thousands of dollars that may have been misused without experienced advice.

THE MOTION PICTURE
CODE AND RATING ADMINISTRATION
HAS RATED THIS SEQUENTIAL FEATURE

H/S

HACK/SLASH TRAILERS

ORBITUARY
ART BY (GRAVITY)

BLOOD & NUTS
ART BY (NEW WARRIORS)

DEAD CELEBRITIES
ART BY (G.I. JOE: AMERICA'S ELITE)

3 COVERS/6 STORIES
MARCH 2006

DDP

HACK/SLASH

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A STORY WITH TRUE SUBSTANCE UNLIMITED POTENTIAL AND SOME GORGEOUS ART

ROBERT RODI (LOKI ELEKTRA) & CLIFF RICHARDS (WONDER WOMAN BUFFY)

PURGATORI

ISSUE 6 · MARCH 2006

COVER BY ALEX HORLEY

G.I. JOE
A REAL AMERICAN HERO!

BEHIND EVERY MYSTERY WAITS A TRUTH TO BE TOLD

SNAKE EYES
DECLASSIFIED

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LARRY HAMA!

- **COLLECTS THE SOLD OUT AND HARD TO FIND ISSUES!**
- **PLUS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE EVENTS + CHARACTERS OF THE ENTIRE SAGA!**

THE COMPLETE TRADE PAPERBACK

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APRIL 2006

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100 WAYS TO KILL LOIS
BY STEWIE GRIFFIN

The Family Guy steps out of the TV screen for the first time in comic book format and written by the characters with the feel of a humor novelty book. The beginning & end of the book features advice from the character's and interspersed will be more traditional comic book stories all written by Matt Fleckenstein (Family Guy TV show writer) .

FAMILY GUY

AS SEEN ON TV

FAMILY GUY: VOL 1 [OF 3]
APRIL 2006 BI-MONTHLY

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DDP

20th CENTURY FOX

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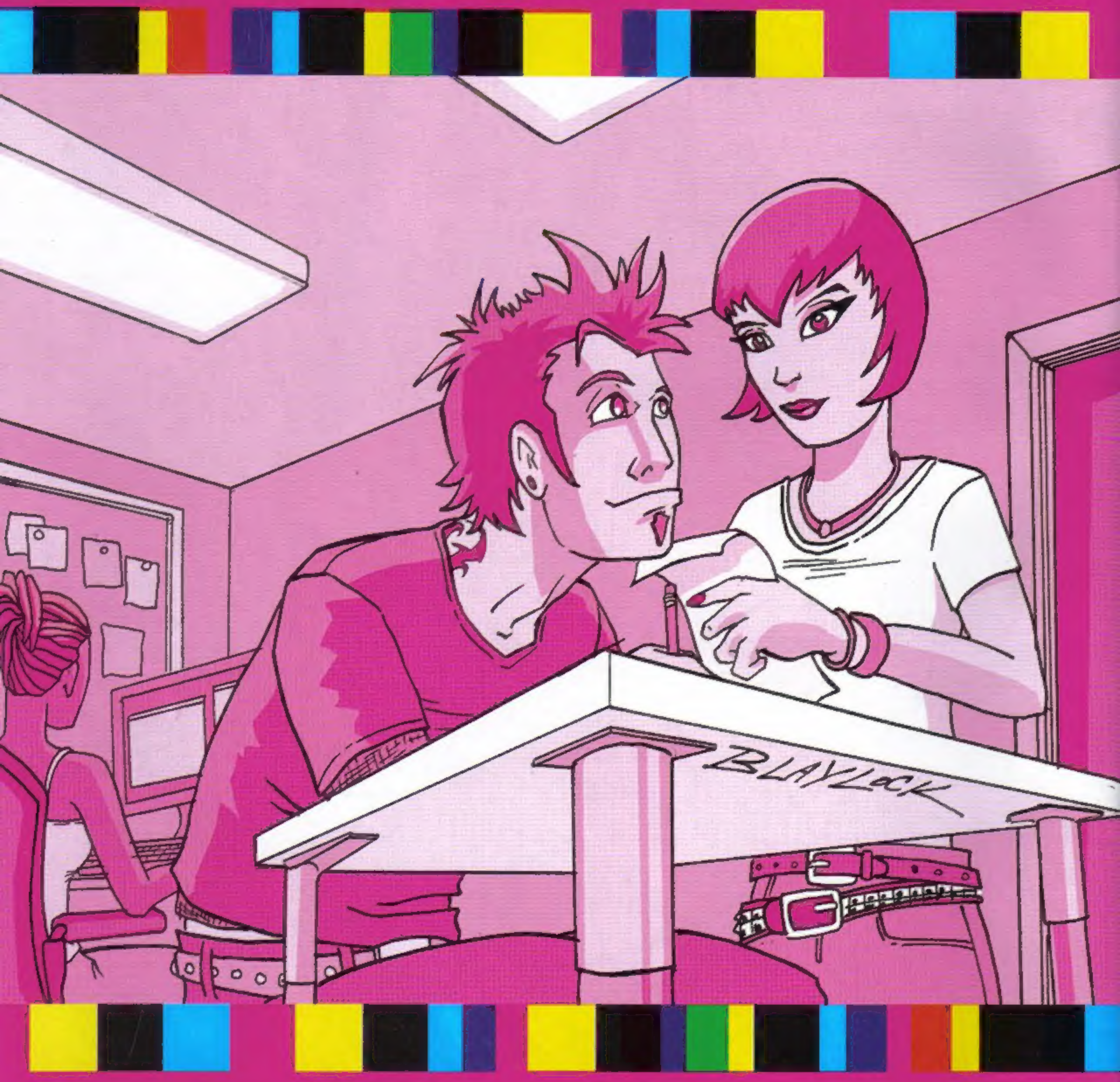
A MUST HAVE FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN PUBLISHING, NO MATTER HOW MODEST OR LOFTY THEIR GOALS MAY BE!

Vol. 2 of 4: **Building Your Creative Team**



HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH COMICS ...NOT JUST CREATE THEM

devil's due publishing

MARCH 2006

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WILDBLUEZERO